



*Coal*

COVERING SECRET

MR TURNBULL

I attach the suggested additional paragraph which we discussed, to be inserted at X on page 2.

*PLG*

P L GREGSON

13 December 1984

COVERING SECRET

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The Prime Minister said that, even if it was neither practicable nor desirable for the NCB to close pits during the period when the talks were in progress, it would be vital to preserve the principle that the colliery review procedures (as modified in the agreement with NACODS) remained continuously in force. The NCB needed to be in a position, if and when agreement on a new Plan for Coal proved to be impossible, to carry on managing the industry and closing pits as necessary. It would be tactically bad for the NCB at that stage to be put in the position of appearing to reimpose closure procedures suspended as a condition of ending the strike.

SECRET



ANDREW



10 DOWNING STREET

MR. GREGSON

Mr. Turnbull dictated this rather hurriedly earlier this afternoon. He asked me to send you a copy of it and he will get in touch about 1600 hours to discuss it.

Vanessa Cummings

Garden Rooms

13 December 1984



RECORD OF A MEETING HELD AT 10 DOWNING STREET AT 0930 HOURS ON THURSDAY 13 DECEMBER 1984.

COAL DISPUTE

The Prime Minister held a meeting today to discuss the TUC's request for a meeting on the coal dispute. Present were the Secretary of State for Energy, Mr. Gregson, Mr. Alison, Mr. Butler and Mr. Turnbull.

The Secretary of State for Energy said the TUC were proposing to put to the NUM and NCB the proposition that there should be a return to work followed by a time-limited discussion of say 8-12 weeks on a new Plan for Coal. The TUC were seeking to establish whether the Government would endorse such an approach.

The Secretary of State for Energy saw some advantages in this approach. It would represent a return to the position as at 6 March when the Board had suggested to the unions that there should be discussions on the future of the industry, following which proposals would be put to Government. In this respect nothing new was being offered. There were also advantages for the Government in lining up behind the TUC on proposals which the NUM were likely to reject. The alternative was to discourage this initiative, while waiting for the NUM to indicate some move towards the NACODS/ACAS settlement. This would put the Government on the defensive and might cause the TUC to strengthen its support for the NUM. Furthermore, a return to work in January for 8 or 12 weeks would allow large movement of coal to the power stations (for this reason a time limit of 12 weeks might be preferable). If, as was to be expected, there was no agreement at the end of this period, the NUM would find it difficult to resume the strike which, in any case, would require a ballot.

The Prime Minister said there were also pitfalls in this approach which must be avoided. First, it was essential that



any talks on the future of the industry take place after a return to work. Secondly, nothing should be agreed which would undercut the position of the working miners. Thirdly, it was essential to prevent the NUM from claiming that the programme of pit closures had been withdrawn, or even that there would be no pit closures while talks continued. It should be clearly seen that the NCB was free to operate the existing Colliery Review Procedure, enhanced by the provisions agreed with NACODS.

The Secretary of State for Energy said that, in practice, no closures would take place during the weeks allowed for the talks on the future of the industry. Time would be needed to finalise the details of the independent review bodies and it would not be possible to run a proposed closure through all its stages during this period. If the NCB did proceed to close pits immediately after the return to work it would risk alienating public opinion. This would not apply, however, to pits closed by flooding or fire as a result of the strike.

The Secretary of State for Energy doubted whether Mr. Scargill would agree to these proposals without conditions. He was likely to maintain his demand that there should be no closure of uneconomic pits, though he might put the proposals to a ballot with a recommendation in favour of rejection.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said the Secretary of State should meet the TUC on Friday morning and should tell them that the Government could go along with its efforts to bring the strike to an end on the basis of a return to work followed by talks on the future of the industry. It should be made clear that this would be a return to normal in which the CRP remained in place subject only to the modification agreed with NACODS.

13 December 1984

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

13 December 1984

COAL DISPUTE

I attach a record of the meeting here earlier today.

I am copying it also to David Normington (Department of Employment) and Peter Gregson (Cabinet Office). I assume you will want to give it only very restricted circulation.

(ANDREW TURNBULL)

Michael Reidy, Esq.,  
Department of Energy.

SMH



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The Secretary of State for Energy saw some advantages in this approach. It would represent a return to the position as at 6 March when the Board had suggested to the unions that there should be discussions on the future of the industry, following which proposals would be put to Government. In this respect nothing new was being offered. There were also advantages for the Government in lining up behind the TUC on proposals which the NUM were likely to reject. The alternative was to discourage this initiative, while waiting for the NUM to indicate some move towards the NACODS/ACAS settlement. This would put the Government on the defensive and might cause the TUC to strengthen its support for the NUM. Furthermore, a return to work in January for 8 or 12 weeks would allow large movement of coal to the power stations (for this reason a time limit of 12 weeks might be preferable). If, as was to be expected, there was no agreement at the end of this period, the NUM would find it difficult to resume the



strike which, in any case, would require a ballot.

The Prime Minister said there were also pitfalls in this approach which must be avoided. First, it was essential that any talks on the future of the industry take place after a return to work. Secondly, nothing should be agreed which would undercut the position of the working miners. Thirdly, it was essential to prevent the NUM from claiming that the programme of pit closures had been withdrawn, or even that there would be no pit closures while talks continued. It should be clearly seen that the NCB was free to operate the existing Colliery Review Procedure, enhanced by the provisions agreed with NACODS.

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